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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to assist teachers and youth leaders in helping youth develop civic action skills. Section 1 offers a planning guide for action projects and focuses on how to develop such a project. Section 2 provides samples of eight community action projects with their descriptions, goals, resources needed, relevant facts and figures, a series of action steps, and methods used to evaluate the project. Section 3 describes skills young people may need to complete an action project. A list of 12 useful books for doing action projects completes the guide. (EH)

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Civic Action Guide

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Introduction

As a teacher or youth leader, you have an exciting opportunity to help young people make important connections between their own lives and the life of the community. Citizenship provides the link. When it stands alone, citizenship is just another word. But with the right skills, resources, and plans, you can help young people make the connection between their own needs, abilities, and the quality of life in the community.

The *Civic Action Guide* is designed to give you the tools you need to help young people achieve the following goals:

- Develop important civic action skills.
- Study and apply eight models of civic action projects.
- Plan, implement, and evaluate their own civic action projects.
- Link personal and group responsibility to citizenship and civic action.
- Recognize citizenship and civic action as an essential part of life.

In the *Civic Action Guide* you will find:

- **Section 1: Planning Guide.** The first part of this section is a handout that describes the *Six Basic Steps of an Action Project*. The second part of this section, *How to Plan the Project* is a handout that focuses on Step 4 of the Six Basic Steps. Also included is a blank *Project Plan* for young people to fill out.
- **Section 2: Eight Community Action Projects.** These one-page participant handouts give you a selection of projects to choose from. Each sheet includes a project description, its goals, the resources needed, some relevant facts and/or figures, a series of action steps, and some methods to evaluate the project.
- **Section 3: Skills for Action Projects.** This section covers skills young people may need to complete an action project.
- **Useful Books.** This is a one-page listing of books that might prove useful for young people doing action projects.

You can use this *Civic Action Guide* to present lessons to young people. Take some time to prepare. Study the following steps, skills, and resources on your own. Then present them to young people to involve them in the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating their own civic action project. We hope you can use this guide and its handouts to make the concept of citizenship come alive for you and your group.

Below are some procedures for introducing young people to the different sections of the *Civic Action Guide*. You can present each section in a separate meeting or combine them.

Planning Guide (Approx. 1 hour)

Explain that today, group members will begin planning their own civic action project to address problems in their community. Ask them to discuss briefly how they would like to see their community change.

1. Hand out copies of *Planning Guide* to each participant.
2. Ask everyone to read *The Six Basic Steps of an Action Project*. Discuss the steps and answer any questions anyone may have.

3. Ask everyone to read *How to Plan the Project*. Point out that this handout focuses one of the *Six Basic Steps of an Action Project*. Discuss this step and answer any questions people may have.

4. Ask group members to look at the blank *Project Plan*. Tell them they will use this form in the next section. Answer any questions they may have.

Eight Community Action Projects (Approx. 1 hour)

1. Break into small groups. Hand out copies of *Eight Community Action Projects* and copies of the blank *Project Plan*.

2. Give each group one of the projects as a sample to use to practice filling out the blank *Project Plan*. Tell group members to use *How to Plan the Project* to help them fill out the blank *Project Plan*.

3. Have each group use their completed *Project Plan* to report on the project they chose. Save the completed *Project Plans*. You will want to use them later.

Skills for Action Projects (Approx. ½ hour)

1. Hand out copies of *Skills for Action Projects* to the whole group. Ask group members to read *Skills for Action Projects*. Answer any questions they may have.

2. Hold a brief discussion about how these skills could be helpful in participating in a community action project.

Choose a Community Action Project (Approx. 2 hours)

1. Use the *Project Plans* completed by the small groups to help you review the *Eight Community Action Projects*. Discuss whether you want to:

- Choose one of the eight action project plans.
- Make up your own project based on the needs of your own community.

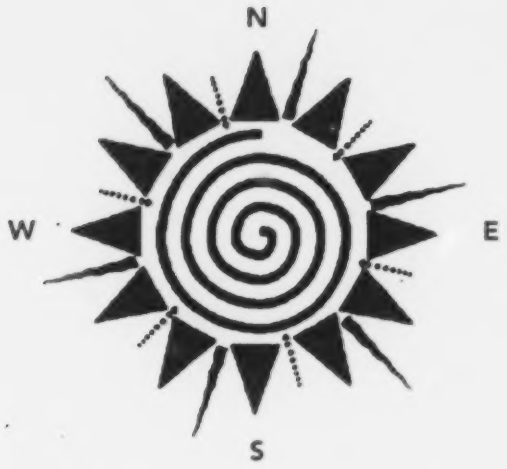
2. Choose one project and use *How to Plan the Project* to help you complete a blank *Project Plan* about the project you have chosen.

Taking Action (As long as needed)

Use your *Project Plan* and the other sections of the *Civic Action Guide* to put your plan into action.

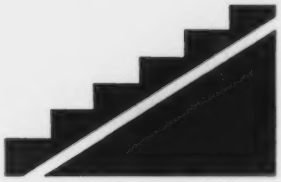
SECTION 1:

Planning Guide



There are basic steps for all action projects. In this section, we will briefly discuss these basic steps and then focus on one of the most important steps—planning the project.

The Six Basic Steps of an Action Project



1. Select a Problem

Get your group together and discuss what community problems concern you. Make a list and choose one problem to focus on. To help you decide, ask the following questions: Which problem affects your community the most? Which would be most interesting to work on? Which could be worked on most easily? Which would you learn the most from?

2. Research the Problem

The more you know about a problem, the more you'll understand how to approach it. Try to find out as much as you can about these questions: What causes the problem? What are its effects on the community? What is being done about the problem? Who is working on the problem or is interested in it?

To find answers to these questions, try the following:

Use the library. Look up newspaper and magazine articles. Ask the reference librarian for help.

Interview experts. Call local government officials. Find people at nonprofit organizations that work on the problem.

Survey community members. Ask questions of people you know in the community. Conduct a formal written survey of community members.

3. Decide on an Action Project

Think of project ideas that would address the problem your team has chosen. Make a list. Ask other people to add their ideas to the list. As a team, decide on the top *three* project ideas. Think about the pros and cons of each project idea. Evaluate each in terms of your available time, materials, and resources. Select the most suitable one.

4. Plan the Project

To prevent false starts or chaotic results, you need a plan. See "How to Plan the Project" below for details.

5. Do the Project

6. Evaluate the Project

While implementing the project, it's important to evaluate—to think about how you are doing and figuring out how you can do things better. At the end of the project, you'll want to evaluate how you did. To make evaluating easy, you'll need to plan for it. See "How to Plan the Project" below for details.

How to Plan the Project

The temptation in any project is to seize the moment, to take action now, to get out there and make some waves. If you take the time to plan now, you will save time, energy, money, and heartbreak because you'll know where you're going and how you're going to get there. In general, the more time spent planning, the less overall time a project takes.

Planning Time	Time Needed for Project

Planning Time	Time Needed for Project

So, before you act, take time to plan.

At the end of this section, there is a blank Project Plan that you can use to plan your project. The rest of this section goes over the different parts of the Project Plan and provides tips on planning and on filling out the form.

All the parts of the plan should fit together and support one another. Take this example:

Let's say you're concerned that kids don't use the park in a particular neighborhood. There is a park recreation center, but it is rundown and has no equipment. As a result, kids don't use the park. They just hang around and get into trouble. What is needed is more and better recreation equipment for the park. This is your **problem statement**.

Your **goal** might be to provide the park with equipment.

The **resources** list who might help you in the community—especially government, non-profit, business, and media organizations. As resources, you might list businesses near the park, the city parks department, a non-profit that works with kids, and the local newspaper.

The **action steps** describe how you are going to do the project. Since it's always important to find out what the people you're helping want, the first step might be to conduct a survey of the kids about what kind of equipment they would like. The next step might be to find out if the city can provide it or if local merchants would be willing to chip in to buy it. A third step might be to raise some money to purchase the equipment.

The **task chart** supports the action steps. Who is going to do what, in which order, and how long will it take?

The **evaluation plan** asks you to determine in advance how you will measure the success of your project. Did you get the equipment? If, so, what and how much? Did the children use the equipment and the park? Did fewer kids hang around the streets and cause problems?

The Project Plan at the end of this section covers the nine parts you need for your plan. We'll go over them one step at a time. But remember: Each one influences the others. Make sure they all fit together. Then you'll have a powerful plan.

1. Project Name

Invent a catchy name for your project. Use it on anything you create for the project—fliers, posters, letterhead, etc.

2. Team Members

Write the names of your team members down. It's good to start thinking about the strengths and talents of each team member so you can make use of everyone on the project.

3. Description of Project

In two or three sentences, summarize the project.

4. Goal of Project

A goal helps chart your course. If you know where you want to go, you can usually determine how to get there. In one sentence, write a specific and do-able goal.

5. Problem Statement

State the problem clearly. It will help you focus on what you can do. Try to boil the problem down to a single sentence. Then briefly write what else you know by answering the following questions: What causes the problem? What are its effects on the community? What do people affected by the problem want done?

6. Resources

List different organizations (or individuals) who might help you with your project. Government, non-profit, and business organizations may be working on the problem or interested in it. Tap into these resources.

7. Action Steps

Your goal tells you where you're going. What steps do you need to take to get there? Write down the details of your plan. Explain how the project will work.

8. Task Chart

Once you have decided on the steps to your plan, break the steps down into tasks. Try to think of everything that needs to be done. Then assign people jobs that they want to do and *can* do. Put someone in charge of reminding people to do their tasks. Set a deadline, or due date, for each task.

9. Evaluation Plan

Take time now to figure out how you are going to measure the success of your project. There are several ways to evaluate a project. Pick the best ways and figure out how to do it for your project.

Before-and-After Comparisons. You can show how things looked or how people felt before your project, then show how your project caused changed. You might use the following to make comparisons: photos, videos, survey results, or test scores.

Counting and Measuring. You can count or measure many different things in a project. For example: How many meetings did you have? How many people attended? How many voters did you register? How much time did you spend? Numbers like these will help you measure your impact on the community.

Comparisons With a Control Group. You may be able to measure your project against a control group—a comparable group that your project does not reach. If, for example, you are trying to rid one part of town of graffiti, you could compare your results to another part of town with the same problem.

Project Plan

1. Name of Project: _____

2. Team Members

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____ 4. _____

5. _____ 6. _____

3. Description of Project:

4. Goal of Project:

5. Problem Statement

Describe, in specific terms, the problem you have selected to work on:

6. Resources

Who is likely to support your project? (Look to government, business, non-profit, and media organizations and community members.) List the resources:

7. Action Steps

What do you need to do? Spell out the basic steps you will need to take to accomplish your goals.

8. Task Chart

What tasks must group members complete to do the action steps? Write the task, the person's name who is responsible for it, and the due date. (Put an X in the last column when the task is done.)

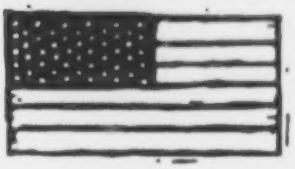
Task	Person	Due Date	X

9. Evaluation Plan: How will you measure the success of the project? Be specific.

SECTION 2:

Eight Community Action Projects

Project #1: Get Out the Vote



Description: Organize a campaign to register new voters.

Goal: To get more citizens to vote.

Facts and Figures: One hundred years ago, about 80 percent of all eligible voters turned out to vote in America's presidential elections. In the last two elections voter turnout has dropped to less than 60 percent. The United States ranks behind almost every other free country in percentage of voter participation.

Resources: Here are some people with information about voter registration...

- League of Women Voters
- The county registrar's office (where voters are registered)

Action Steps: To register new voters, you need to...

- **Find voter registration materials.** Call the registrar of voters in your community get the forms you need to register new voters and undergo any necessary training.
- **Choose a site.** Pick a busy location where people can easily stop to register. A shopping mall is an ideal place for a voter registration table.
- **Get permission.** Visit your site ahead of time to ask the people in charge for permission to set up a table.
- **Set up a portable table.** Draw an easy-to-read sign explaining what you are doing. Display it on the table.
- **Register voters.** Introduce yourself and explain what you are doing. Be organized. Busy people don't want to stand around while you shuffle papers or look for a pencil. Have voter registration forms and pens readily available. Be polite. If a person is not interested in your campaign, don't argue. Others will want to register. Ask people to fill in the voter registration form on the spot. If they take it with them, you may not ever see it again. Congratulate new voters when they have completed their registration. They can now participate in the electoral process.
- **Finish the job.** Clean up and thank the people who gave you permission to set up your voter registration table. You may want to come back again.

Evaluation: After you have completed your voter registration project, meet with other team members to ask...

- How many new voters did you register?
- How many team members were involved? How many hours did you work?
- Would you organize another voter registration project? What would you do differently?

Project #2: What's the Issue?

Description: Organize a group discussion or forum about an important community issue.

Goal: To increase knowledge and discussion about an important community issue.

Facts and Figures: Most Americans get their news from television, yet most television stations devote little coverage to local issues (other than crime). You can hold a forum to discuss issues not covered in the media.

Resources: Here are some places to look for experts...

- **Government, non-profit, business, and media organizations.** See "Finding Resources" in *Skills for Action Projects*.
- **Home.** Ask your family if they know people who are familiar with community issues.

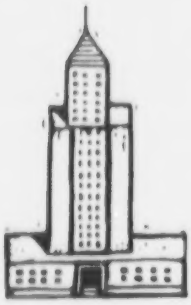
Action Steps: To organize your discussion, you need to...

- **Select an issue.** Ask these questions to help focus your discussion: How interested is the community in the issue? Will it be exciting or fun to work on?
- **Find a site.** Look for a large, clean space that is easy for people to find. Get permission to use the space.
- **Set a date.** Allow time to organize your program and tell people about the issue you will discuss.
- **Invite experts.** Choose two or three experts who know something about the issue you have chosen to discuss. If the issue is controversial, get experts that represent different points of view.
- **Invite community members.** Put a lot of effort into outreach. Make posters and leaflets describing the time, place, and issue you plan to discuss. Use the phone; invite your friends.
- **Set an agenda.** Choose a moderator to lead the discussion. Everyone can't speak at once. How will you decide who speaks? When will your experts speak? How will you establish time limits?
- **Finish the job.** Clean up and thank the people who let you use the space. Thank your experts.

Evaluation:

- Prepare an evaluation survey for audience members to fill out.
- How many community members attended? Experts?
- Did your group work well as a team? Why or why not?
- If you conducted another community issue discussion, what would you do differently?

Project #3: Exploring Local Government



Description: Organize a tour of local government institutions for school children.

Goal: To educate school children about people, places, and processes that make up local government.

Facts and Figures: Part of the school social studies curriculum at all levels is the study of local government. As part of this study, students in Grand Rapids, Michigan, gained membership on more than 100 local government boards and commissions. Although these students cannot vote, they bring young people's points of view to community decision-making.

Resources: Here are some people and materials with information about local government:

- Elected officials and government department heads
- Reference librarian at your library
- A written guide to your local government

Action Steps: To organize a local government tour, you need to...

- **Measure interest.** Visit local schools to find out if students, parents, teachers, and administrators are interested.
- **Explore government.** Use the *Resources* listed above to help you gather information about government officials, departments, and services.
- **Ask permission.** Call government offices, describe your project to the people in charge, and ask them if they would allow young people to visit their work places.
- **Record your findings.** Keep a record of the people you contact. You will need to keep in touch.
- **Pick and choose.** What government departments would be most interesting for young people?
- **Prepare a tour guide.** Prepare a talk or a written guide about the people and places students will be visiting.
- **Draw a tour map.** Where will you go? How will you get there? How long will it take?
- **Arrange transportation.** Talk with teachers and administrators about the safest, easiest way to transport students. How many students, teachers, parents, and team members will participate?

Evaluation:

- Prepare a pre- and post-test on local government for students to take.
- How many officials, departments, and services did you visit? Did you visit a variety of people and places?
- How many children, parents, teachers, and school administrators took the tour?

Project #4: Neighborhood Watch Program

Description: Organize a Neighborhood Watch program in your community.

Goal: To increase community safety and security.

Facts and Figures: Several years ago, a Richmond, Virginia neighborhood experienced three murders, two rapes, and 134 burglaries. Community members organized a Neighborhood Watch program that organized and educated residents on crime prevention. Two years later there were no murders, no rapes, and only 20 burglaries in that same neighborhood.

Resources: Here are some places to ask about neighborhood crime prevention...

- The National Safety Council
- Your state's Crime Prevention Council
- The crime prevention officer of your police department

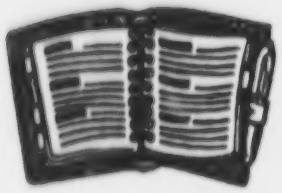
Action Steps: To begin your Neighborhood Watch program...

- **Contact your local police.** Many police precincts have a crime prevention officer who can help you get started. Ask him or her to attend your first meeting.
- **Measure interest.** Talk to your neighbors. You will need their help. A Neighborhood Watch does not take a lot of time and no one will have to take any personal risks.
- **Arrange a date, time, and place for the first meeting.** Notify neighbors with a flyer. A few interested neighbors can get the ball rolling.
- **Invite a crime prevention officer.** Ask the officer to explain Neighborhood Watch, talk about crime problems in your area, and teach crime prevention techniques.
- **Select a block captain.** This task can rotate. A block captain acts as a liaison between police and your group, organizes block meetings, and keeps a list of members.
- **Share information.** Exchange phone numbers, names of family members, planned vacation times, and any other information that will help you protect each other.
- **Share the tasks.** Some job assignments could be recruiting new members, teaching home security techniques, holding a vacation home watch, or being block parents for home-alone kids.

Evaluation:

- Find out crime rates for your neighborhood. See if they improve once your watch begins.
- Keep track of membership. Does it increase over time?
- Ask for comments from neighbors. Is the program working? Do they feel safer?

Project #5: Building a Community Resource Guide



Description: Create a guide of government, non-profit, business, and media organizations that address the needs of your community.

Goal: To gather information that will help team members and others find information, concerned citizens, community groups, and materials to support civic participation projects.

Facts and Figures: Your community has many groups and organizations interested in community problems.

Resources: Here are some places to look for local resources...

- The local library
- Government, non-profit, business, and media organizations. See "Finding Resources" in *Skills for Action Projects*.

Action Steps: To create a resource guide...

- **Discuss your goals.** Focus your search around issues that are important to your community. Do you want your resource guide to address problems of health, education, public safety, the environment? What other problems concern you?
- **Design your guide.** How will you collect and distribute your information? On a computer? Will you print a booklet or keep a loose-leaf notebook full of resources? How will you make it available to others?
- **Visit the library.** Ask the reference librarian for lists of community organizations.
- **Talk to local government officials.** They may be able to direct you toward city programs that work with citizens in the community. Ask them for any booklets describing local civic resources.
- **Talk to local businesses.** Talk to the Chamber of Commerce about businesses that work in your community.
- **Look for non-profits.** Many of these groups are organized specially to help people.
- **Talk to the local media.** Newspapers, radio, and television stations usually know about local resources.
- **Ask for referrals.** Ask everyone you talk with if they know of other people who can help you.
- **Don't stop.** Keep adding new information to your resource guide.

Evaluation:

- How many resources are in your guide?
- How many community members did you involve?
- Who is using your guide? Is it helpful to them?

Project #6: Tree-Planting Day

Description: Hold a tree-planting day in your community.

Goal: To organize a day for community members to plant trees at a park, along a road, or at a school.

Facts and Figures: Trees help the environment. They manufacture oxygen, reduce air pollution, cut energy needs, prevent soil erosion, recycle water, and provide homes for various animals. It has been estimated that in 50 years, one tree provides $62,000 in air-pollution control, creates $31,000 of oxygen, recycles $37,000 of water, and provides $31,000 in soil protection.

Resources:

- Local nurseries
- Your local electric utility
- Environmental non-profits
- Your local parks or forestry department
- American Forestry Association

Action Steps: To hold a tree-planting day...

- **Select a site.** Where do you want to plant the trees?
- **Get written permission.** Go to the school, government agency, or property owner whose land it is.
- **Select the trees.** Research which type of trees are most suitable to your area and what benefits they have. Find out how to plant them.
- **Make a plan.** Decide on a day, how many trees, where they'll be planted, what you'll need.
- **Contact your local utility companies.** There might be gas, water, telephone, or electric lines underground. Tell the companies where you plan to dig. While you're talking to them, ask for their support.
- **Get support.** Trees beautify and increase property values. Ask nearby businesses, residents, and neighborhood associations for donations. See if nurseries will donate trees. Ask the parks department and environmental non-profits for help.
- **Organize your supplies.** You'll need trees, soil, fertilizer, water, shovels, rakes, gloves, refreshments, etc. Ask a utility or nursery to donate hole-drilling equipment and someone to operate it.
- **Publicize your event.** Contact local newspapers and radio stations. Have schools send announcements home. Put up fliers in the neighborhood.
- **Make sure someone will take care of the trees.** Trees need long-term care. Get the property owner, an environmental non-profit, or the parks department to make the commitment.

Evaluation:

- How many trees did you plant?
- How many people participated?

Project #7: Feed the Homeless

Description: Create a garden that will grow food for a homeless shelter.

Goals: To build a garden that will provide fresh vegetables for a homeless shelter.

Facts and Figures: In America, there are an estimated 600,000 to 3 million homeless people. Homeless shelters constantly seek food donations—canned food, leftovers from restaurants. Most shelters would appreciate fresh food as well.

Resources:

- Homeless shelters
- Local nurseries

Action Steps: To create a garden for the homeless...

- **Find a site.** It can be a vacant lot or an unused section at a school.
- **Get permission from the landowner.** Go to the school, business, government agency, or person who owns the property.
- **Research what will grow in your area.** Find out which plants grow best, when and how to grow them, which provide the most nourishment, and which produce the greatest yields.
- **Contact a homeless shelter.** See if it needs vegetables. Ask what kind it wants.
- **Get materials for the garden.** You'll need seeds, a watering system, soil, shovels, and gardening tools. Solicit donations of supplies, money, expertise, and volunteer work. Ask local businesses, nurseries, neighbors, and restaurants involved in feeding-the-homeless programs. If necessary, hold a fund raiser.
- **Prepare the garden.** You may have to clear land. Or you may plant in planters.
- **Assign tasks for maintaining the garden.** You'll need different people who can water, weed, prune, harvest the garden.
- **Arrange for delivery.** Will the shelter come pick up the vegetables? Will you deliver them?
- **Make long-term arrangements.** Is your garden just for one season? Then you need to restore the land. If you want the garden to continue, someone will need to take responsibility for it. That can be your group, a teacher, a non-profit group, a neighborhood association.

Evaluation:

- How many pounds or bags of vegetables did you donate?
- How many people participated in the garden?

Project #8: Teaching Teens

Description: Organize a mentoring project at a local teen center or other non-profit organization.

Goals: To help educate young people.

Facts and Figures: On an average day in the United States...

- 2,795 women under 20 get pregnant
- 6 teen-agers commit suicide
- 1,512 teen-agers drop out of school
- 211 youths are arrested for drug abuse
- 437 youths are arrested for drinking or drunk driving

Would you be interested in helping teen-agers avoid being part of these statistics? Providing tutoring, counseling, and just good company can give teen-agers the guidance they need to make good life choices.

Resources: For advice on tutoring and mentoring, refer to...

- Council for Aid to Education
- Educational Resources Information Center
- U.S. Department of Education
- Literacy Volunteers of America

Action Steps:

- **Find a place.** Find a teen center or other non-profit youth organization. See "Finding Resources" in *Skills for Action Projects*.
- **Measure interest.** Visit the teen center and ask the people in charge if they would be interested in a mentoring program run by your group.
- **Plan your approach.** How will you work with teen-agers? In groups? One-on-one? Do you need adult supervision?
- **Focus your attention.** Do you want to deal with teen-age academic problems such as illiteracy? Do you want to supervise out-of-school activities? Think up a list of projects that you would enjoy doing.
- **Set goals.** Ask teen-agers what they want to accomplish. Then discuss how they want to accomplish that goal.
- **Set a time line.** Commit to a regular schedule—say once a week for six months—to meet the goals you set.
- **Organize a "graduation."** Plan an event to celebrate meeting your goals. Invite parents and people who run the teen center to support the progress you have made.

Evaluation:

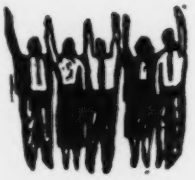
- How many teen-agers are involved? Group members? Parents and teen center staff?
- Are you meeting the goals you set with teen-agers?

SECTION 3:

Skills for Action Projects

This section covers some skills you may need in doing an action project in the community: opinion surveying, interviewing, speaking in public, and finding resources.

Opinion Survey



By taking an opinion poll, you can learn what people in the community think. There are three steps to surveying:

1. Create a Survey

Make most of your questions multiple choice and yes/no. This will make your survey easy to tabulate.

Keep the survey short and simple.

Be sure that your questions do not force particular answers. They must be unbiased. Otherwise your survey results will be open to criticism.

Test your survey. Before conducting the survey, ask someone to check it over. Does that person think it is clear?

2. Select the Population and Sample

Determine the population. What will your poll results represent? The opinions of everyone in the community? Of a section of the community? Select the population you want the poll to cover.

Select a sample. You don't have to poll the entire population to get a good idea of how people in the population feel. Try to get a random sample of the population. This means that every person in the population has the same chance of taking the survey. For example, telephoning the fifth person on the each page of the phone book would be a random sample.

3. Conduct the Survey

Introduce yourself. Practice a brief introduction. When approaching a stranger, introduce yourself, tell what group you are from, explain the survey's purpose, and ask whether the person would mind spending a few minutes answering it.

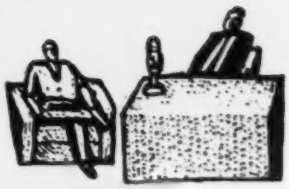
Tell all interviewees that they do not have to put their names on the survey. Results will be reported anonymously.

Be as organized as possible. Use a clipboard to hold the surveys and bring extra pens or pencils.

Be polite. People who answer your survey are doing you a favor. Don't badger anyone to take the survey.

Wait for each survey and check it. Make sure the information is complete. If you read the survey to the respondent and fill it in, write exactly what the person says.

Interviewing



Here are some tips on interviewing community people, especially people working in government, business, non-profit, and media organizations.

Make an appointment over the phone. Explain your visit's purpose. Set an exact date and time. Get the address and directions On the day before the appointment, call and confirm the appointment.

Look right and be on time. People make judgments based on how you look and act. If you create the right impression, people usually respond in a positive way.

Rehearse the interview with a partner. Go through the introduction, questions, thank you, and good-bye.

Prepare your questions in writing. Make sure the questions cover everything you need.

Cover each point before going on to the next. If you do not understand what a person is saying, ask for an explanation.

Take notes. Keep your notes brief so you remain attentive to the speaker. Afterward, make complete notes.

Find out if the person has any useful literature or contacts. Many organizations have literature or brochures that may be useful. Ask if there is someone else or another organization who could help you.

Thank the person. Send a short *handwritten* thank-you note within a week. It's polite and will ease future contact with the person.

Speaking in Public

If you're prepared and you believe in the importance of what you have to say, then speaking to a group will be easy. Here are some tips on preparing and presenting your speech.

Decide on the purpose of the speech. Sum it up in one sentence.

Brainstorm ideas for the speech. Write down all your ideas.

Organize your ideas and write the speech. Your speech should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. First tell the audience what you're going to say, then say it, and conclude by telling them what you've said.

Practice, practice, practice. Highlight the speech's main points in marker or make an outline, which you can glance at.

Dress right for the occasion.

Finding Resources—Organizations and Experts

There are probably many people and groups in your community already working on the same problem as you. They can be tremendous resources. This section will show you how to find people in (1) government, (2) non-profits, (3) business, and (4) the media who are interested in your problem. To locate them, you will need two things: a telephone and a local telephone book. Once you locate resources in the phone book, call them and ask: What is being done about the problem? Who is working on it or interested in it? One group will lead you to many others.

1. Finding Resources in Government

Government officials, committees, boards, and departments work on community problems. Call your local elected representatives to find out who's interested in your problem. In the telephone directory, find the government pages (sometimes called the Blue Pages), which are usually located just before the White Pages. They list government offices separately under the headings of your city, county, state, and U.S. government. Under your city, look for city council members. Under county, look for county supervisors. If you can't find them, call the main numbers under the city and county listings. Or go to the library and ask the reference librarian for a list of local officials. Most local governments publish a guide that describes the different boards, commissions, committees, and departments and lists names, addresses, and telephone numbers of officials.

2. Finding Resources in Non-Profits

These groups cover the wide realm of organizations that are neither government nor business. They are **not** in business to make a profit. These organizations vary widely—neighborhood associations, advocacy groups, environmental groups, volunteer organizations, charities, service organizations, fraternal societies, unions, churches, etc. Many of these groups play an active role in working on community problems. Look for groups that might be interested in your problem.

Look in the Yellow Pages under "Educational Organizations" and "Educational Consultants"; "Environmental, Conservation, & Ecological Organizations"; "Fraternal Organizations"; "Human Services Organizations" or "Social Service Organizations"; "Labor Organizations"; "Political Organizations"; "Religious Organizations" and "Churches"; and "Senior Citizens' Services & Organizations."

To find neighborhood associations, contact your local representative. Or if you know a resident in the neighborhood, ask this person.

Call United Way or Volunteer Center. Ask (1) for its information-and-referral directory and (2) what volunteer groups are working on a problem.

The front of many telephone books list community service organizations.

3. Finding Resources in Business

Businesses and business groups are intensely interested in your community. Start with local business associations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, which perform much civic-improvement and volunteer work. Look in the Yellow Pages under "Chambers of Commerce," "Business and Trade Associations," "Associations," and "Professional Associations." Your Chamber of Commerce probably has a list of business associations.

Next find service organizations, such as Kiwanis, Rotary International, Lions, and Junior Chamber of Commerce (the Jaycees). These groups, while not officially business groups, are largely made up of business people. Members join to serve the community, socialize, and network with other business people. Look in the Yellow Pages under "Clubs" and "Associations" or look in the White Pages under the name of the group.

Finally, find individual businesses. These you will have to do legwork on. Look for businesses near the problem or who would have a natural interest in the problem.

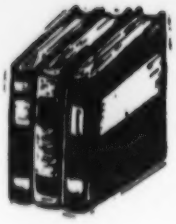
4. Finding Resources in the Media

The media—radio, television, newspapers—are businesses, but businesses with the special power to inform and influence the public. Reporters who have covered a problem probably know about groups in the community who are interested in the problem. Plus the media can give you publicity, which can bring attention to your problem, attract volunteers, and advertise an event.

Read your newspaper or listen to broadcasts. (You might even keep a clip file on your problem's coverage in the local newspaper.) Find out who covers the problems you are interested in. Then call the newspaper or station, ask for the newsroom, and ask to speak with the reporter.

For locating newspapers, look in the Yellow Pages under "Newspapers." You'll be surprised how many are listed. For locating television stations, look in the Yellow Pages under "Television Stations and Broadcast Companies." For locating radio stations, look in the Yellow Pages under "Radio Stations and Broadcasting Companies." Or if you only want to contact a particular newspaper or station, look it up in the White Pages.

Useful Books



Community Action

Active Citizen Today Field Guide by Bill Hayes and Charles Degelman. Los Angeles: Constitutional Rights Foundation and Close Up Foundation (1994).

Changing Our World: A Handbook for Young Activists by Paul Fleisher. Tucson, Ariz.: Zephyr Press (1993).

Making a Difference: Effective Citizenship by Maryrose Eannace. Adapted from *Effective Participation in Government: A Guide to Policy Skills* by William D. Coplin and Michael K. O'Leary. Croton-on-Hudson, NY: Policy Studies Associates (1991).

We Are Resourceful: A Community Problem-Solving Resource Kit for Young People United Way of America (1993).

Skills

Find It Fast: How to Uncover Expert Information on Any Subject by Robert I. Berkman. New York: Harper & Row (1990).

Gale Research Company's *Encyclopedia of Associations*. This publication lists non-profit organizations by subject and area.

"Simplified Parliamentary Procedure: Based on Robert's Rules of Order" League of Women Voters (1979)

Issues

Annual Edition series. Published annually by the Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc., these oversized paperbacks contain current articles on a wide variety of issues.

National Issues Forum Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co. This company publishes 30-page booklets on various social issues.

Opposing Viewpoints series. Greenhaven Press. This company publishes full-length books focusing on various social issues.

Community Facts and Figures

County and City Data Book U.S. Government. This provides census data on about 3,000 counties and 1,000 cities of more than 25,000 inhabitants.

Places Rated Almanac: Your Guide to Finding the Best Places to Live in North America by David Savageau and Richard Boyer. Full of interesting charts and statistics, this book ranks American cities under 10 categories: cost of living, jobs, housing, transportation, education, health care, crime, arts, recreation, and climate.

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